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ABSTRACT

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has reemerged as a hot topic in policy debates on educational developments in developing nations. This renewed interest in TVET is motivated by the necessity to address the new economic challenges stemming from recognition of the role of knowledge in economic development and the deep transformation of labor markets associated with globalization. Depending on specific national contexts, the TVET reform agenda could be defined around the following broad directions: redefining TVET around broader competencies; the need to expand/delay TVET provision at the postcompulsory level; and the need to conceive school-based education and training as the first step of lifelong learning. For developing countries, research can be seen as moving in the following directions: assessing the results of ongoing policies; documenting new developments or relatively neglected issues; and providing training for disadvantaged groups. Putting TVET into action faces a number of obstacles, including lack of research capacities in developing countries and the linkage of research to the donor agencies that finance it. Strengthening the links between research and policy requires pursuing two directions, namely, training of TVET planners, managers, and policymakers and dissemination and access to research results. (MN)

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From research to reality: an international perspective (international panel)

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Preliminary remarks

This paper will be focused on developing countries and limited to policy issues (as opposed to learning and teaching issues).

TVET seem to re-emerge as one of the hot topics in the policy debate on educational development. This increasing attention being paid to TVET was clearly expressed two years ago at the UNESCO International Congress that took place in Seoul. This focus is also clear when looking at the policy agenda of countries like Australia or at recent policy documents issued by OECD and the European Union.

To a large extent, this renewed interest for TVET is motivated by the necessity to address new economic challenges. In this context, three factors are playing a key role:

- Increasing recognition of the role of knowledge in economic development (in particular in relation to the new growth theories);
- The context of globalisation, and the need to maintain, through skill development, international competitiveness;
- The deep transformation of labour markets associated with globalisation, including casualisation of work and a continuing expansion of the informal economy in many developing countries.

In this overall framework, TVET policies in developing countries are confronted with:

- The post-Dakar agenda (World Forum on Education for All, 2000) and the renewed priority for basic education (including secondary education);
- Poor conditions of TVET systems:
  - neglect
  - expansion
  - poor performance (in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance).

The TVET reform agenda and the contribution of research

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In this context, what are the key issues in TVET reform and what has been the contribution of research to the policy process? Depending on specific national contexts, the reform agenda could be defined around three broad directions:

- Redefining TVET around broader competencies;
- The need to expand/delay TVET provision at the post-compulsory level;
- The need to conceive school-based education and training as the first step of lifelong learning.

Research is very much dependent on funding; therefore, TVET research on developing countries is closely associated with the international research agenda.

It is worth recalling that in the 90s, TVET in developing countries did not attract much interest ('lost decade for TVET'). Two main reasons explain this phenomenon:

1. *At the national level*, following the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All, the priority for basic education was often interpreted as a priority for primary education;

2. *At the international level*, the 1991 World Bank policy paper on TVET focused primarily on private sector provision through:

    - private providers (the ultimate goal being the establishment of a market for training);
    - work-based training.

As a result, TVET attracted little attention and less resources.

For developing countries, recent changes in the policy agenda can be related to three main challenges:

- *Economic challenge*: meeting the needs of globalisation and preventing marginalisation (particularly for sub-Saharan Africa);

- *Educational challenge*: countries need to accommodate the expansion of primary education that took place in the 90s, which means increasing the capacity but also the diversity of education and training pathways;

- *Political challenge*: rising youth unemployment and the need to provide responses to the growing number of out-of-school, out-of-work youth to maintain social cohesion.

Consequently, developing countries have put increasing pressure on the international community to support TVET. In this context, without being exhaustive, the emerging policy and research agenda includes three key areas:

- The transition from school to work, including the need to make TVET institutions more responsive to the needs of the labour market. This concern motivates the global interest for apprenticeship schemes and work experience programmes.

- Reforming the institutional framework to finance and govern TVET – a key principle being partnership with industry. The establishment of National Training Boards and of National Training Funds represents an important trend in this effort.

- Promoting competency-based training and establishing national qualification frameworks is also a significant trend in an increasing number of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In the light of such developments, a number of issues require additional investigations.

The penetration of market-oriented paradigms in education shaped the reform process along similar lines:

- Shifting the policy focus from inputs to outputs (through new financing and certification mechanisms);

- Involving social partners, primarily employers, in the governance of the TVET systems;

- Granting more autonomy to TVET institutions;

- Promoting private providers and company-based training.

Research can be seen in two directions:

- Assessing the results of on-going policies, in particular with regard to:

    - National Training Funds - are they efficient? Do they lead to a decrease of the cost of training? Are they effective? Are the new financing mechanisms sustainable?

    - Competency-based training - these reforms raise a number of implementation issues. What does it take to implement a competency-based system? How much does it cost? Similarly, not much is known on its impact on:

        - the quality of training
        - the responsiveness/relevance of training
        - the promotion of lifelong learning.

- Documenting new developments or relatively neglected issues such as:

    - the rise of private provision:

        - profile of private providers
        - efficiency, effectiveness of private training
        - role of the state, comparative analysis of regulatory tools.

- Training provision for disadvantaged groups; access to learning opportunities remain unequally available. How do we ensure that the large number of primary and secondary school leavers access skills? What is the role of NGOs? What links should be established between training policy and poverty reduction frameworks?

Translating research into action

Putting TVET into action faces a number of obstacles:

- Lack of research capacities in developing countries
- Research is linked to donor agencies (who finance it)
    - advantage: impact on policy directions
    - limits: lack of autonomy (choice of the topics to be searched is often dictated by outsiders).

Two directions need to be further pursued to strengthen the links between research and policy, namely:

- Training: TVET planners, managers, policy-makers; training closely related to the policy cycle (formulation, implementation, evaluation); 'just in time' training.
- Dissemination and access to research results. In this respect, the newly-established agreement between NCVER and UNESCO to make the NCVER database available to an international audience, through a UNESCO website, will constitute a very useful step towards increasing the access to TVET research findings.

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